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Glocal routes in British Asian drama: Between adaptation and tradaptation

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Abstract: In the context of British Asian theatre and the search for a diasporic theatre aesthetics the practice of adaptation has emerged as a recurring feature. Over the last decades, British Asian theatre has sought to create a language of the theatre that can reflect the cultural heritage of Asians in Britain; this search has taken different directions testified also by the plurality of voices that today make up British Asian theatre and has responded to the need to challenge the conceptual binary of British and Asian, aiming to affirm South Asian culture on the stage as an integral part of British culture. Adaptation also plays a role in highlighting the dialectic between local and the global particularly in those cases where regions of Britain such as the Northwest of England can be recreated on stage as South Asian British cultural spaces. After tracing Tara Arts's pioneering journey from adaptation to tradaptation, we will examine two British Asian plays that are adaptations of English plays which belong to a tradition of playwriting located in the social and cultural life of the Northwest of England and which are given a new life or an afterlife in translations.

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Glocal Routes in British Asian Drama: Between Adaptation and Tradaptation

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In the context of British Asian theatre and the search for a diasporic theatre aesthetics, the practice of adaptation has emerged as a recurring feature.¹ Over the last decades, British Asian theatre has sought to create a language of the theatre that can reflect the cultural heritage of Asians in Britain, while also responding to the need to challenge the conceptual binary of British and Asian. The plurality of voices that today make up British Asian theatre share a common, if implicit, aim of affirming South Asian culture on the stage as an integral part of British culture. As Dominic Hingorani has pointed out, “British Asian theatre has not only been concerned with the reproduction of culturally ‘traditional’ forms from the South Asian subcontinent ... but has also focused on the contemporary frame and the emergence of new and dynamic forms as a result of this hybrid cultural location” (7). As this article will argue, adaptations as cultural relocations can provide an effective strategy for mapping this hybrid cultural location.

Through their revisionist approach to intertextuality, these adaptations also highlight the dialectic between the local and the global, whether in their recreation of regions, such as the northwest of Britain as South Asian British cultural spaces, or of the entangled histories of South Asian and European epic and theatrical traditions. The connotations of the terms “adaptation” and “routes” speak to this tension between the immediate environmental demands and the farther-reaching forces that shape the lives of migrants and where, as James Clifford has shown, the old adage of “roots always precede routes” (3) has been overturned. It is in this arguably productive tension that these practices of adaptation intervene, as we can see in the adaptations of contemporary English plays by individual playwrights such as Tanika Gupta or Ayub Khan-Din, and in the tradaptations of the Tara Arts theatre company.

Just as feminist theatre practitioners “have experimented with dramatic form, mise-en-scène, language, and the body to ... re-present images of women and gender ideology woven into canonical texts ... and theater practices” (Friedman 1), the reworking of canonical

material has been an important part of the theatrical practice of British Asian dramatists and theatre companies since the 1970s. As Jatinder Verma, the artistic director of Britain's oldest South Asian theatre company, Tara Arts, has suggested, their condition as South Asians in Britain is that of "translated people" (qtd. in Ley 350-351), literally borne across, following a metaphor evoked by Salman Rushdie who in his writing has often compared the condition of migrancy to the process of translation (Rushdie 17). British Asian companies have worked towards articulating a language of the theatre that expresses transcultural experience and reflects on the negotiation between British and Asian cultural spaces, and have consistently explored levels of interlingual and intercultural translation in their productions. They specifically address cultural translation as a theme, a rhetorical strategy, and an instrument of both resistance and assimilation, offering British audiences a theatrical experience that constantly shifts between the familiar and the foreign. This process has mainly been achieved by confronting different traditions, usually through the adaptation of classic works of the western tradition such as Molière or Shakespeare, interpreted by an Asian cast and often relocated in a different cultural setting.

Yet, the increasing reliance on adaptations of modern classics on the part of South Asian British companies has also sparked some criticism. With specific reference to a then-forthcoming production of Emily Brontë's classic *Wuthering Heights* by the London-based company Tamasha, playwright Parv Bancel remarked in *The Guardian* how adaptations stifle new writing as they divert the playwrights' attention away from writing stories drawing on the life of South Asian communities in Britain. In Bancel's view "western classics sprinkled with a little bit of garam masala seem to be the only way to get British Asian theatre companies into main-house theatres." Furthermore he is particularly wary of the fact that these adaptations tend to equate the intolerant and repressed Victorian family values with those of modern, British Asian families. As he further argues: "take the oppressed Victorian female and equate her to a modern south-Asian female. And that's it. With a slight change in climate and a suitable town where ethnic minorities are common, you have your adaptation. No more thought seems necessary" (Bancel). He then questions the suitability of old family or social relations, and possibly of old cultural values to reflect contemporary South Asian life in Britain. He does not approve of the way adaptations, in order to attract larger and diverse audiences, tend to give a classic text a new Asian life by drawing on the current visibility of Asian popular culture and interpolating in the production elements of spectacle that have proved successful with cross cultural audiences, such as Bollywood song and dance. In this way they tend to exploit their exotic potential and deliberately resort to what Graham Huggan in his study *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* has called the marketing and "the staging of marginality" (xii), seen as one of the possible dangers when negotiating the transition from a marginal cultural position to the mainstream.²

After tracing Tara Arts's transition from pioneer British Asian theatre company to established producer of adaptations, we will examine two British Asian adaptations of English plays which belong to a tradition of playwriting located in the social and cultural life of the northwest of England and which are given a new life or an afterlife in translations. Tara's approach to adaptations might be considered foundational for British Asian theatre, both for their early visibility and provision of roles for British Asian actors, as well as for their choice of temporal and spatial settings. Most of their works locate themselves outside of the UK, whether in the Asian settings of *Tartuffe* (1990) or the South African setting of *Oedipus the King* (1991), and are often set in the past rather than the present—producing a revisionist glocal historiography for British audiences and alternative pretext for the depictions of modern diasporic conditions provided through the Gupta and Khan-Din adaptations discussed later.

Despite the potential drawbacks and limitations of adaptations and their contested suitability to adequately represent British South Asian diasporic life, we would like to suggest that by combining culturally diverse elements, Ayub Khan-Din's take on Bill Naughton's play *All in Good Time* and Tanika Gupta's rewriting of Harold Brighouse's comedy *Hobson's Choice* contribute to the process of what Verma has described as "'Binglishing' the stage," that is, creating a theatre tradition that is black and English, exploring a distinct theatre practice that "puts together fragments of diverse cultures," places cultural hybridity at the centre of the stage, and "seems to point Asian theatre in two directions at once: towards the memory of ancestral lands in India and Pakistan and towards the reflection and refraction of contemporary England." ("Binglishing" 133)

Both original plays undergo a process of cultural adaptation that is visible at the level of the playtexts, but is also reinforced in performance. *Rafta, Rafta* revitalizes a comedy that originally drew on northern working class archetypes of the 1960s that are no longer particularly relevant to contemporary audiences. These audiences, on the other hand, can engage more effectively with a story that explores contemporary diasporic life and has cross-cultural appeal. *Hobson's Choice*, unlike *All in Good Time*, is still a favourite play with British audiences and is regularly produced in Britain. It has been reworked by Gupta so as to imagine contemporary South Asian life in the town of Salford, deliberately trying to establish a link between the past history of the town and its present diasporic reality and global connections, by evoking the world of textile manufacturing and that of the rag trade. Like feminist theatrical adaptations, both plays aspire to "transcend reproduction and adaptation to become theatrical dialogues with their source texts ... to invoke that work and yet be different from it" (Friedman 1).

The first British Asian company to stage such adaptations, Tara Arts, marked its thirtieth anniversary in 2007, making it one of the longest-enduring theatre companies in the UK and the oldest British Asian company. Based in London, Tara has long been a touchstone for South Asian and British South Asian theatre artists throughout the UK,

and its influence on contemporary British theatre has been widely acknowledged. Its repertoire extends well beyond adaptation, as indicated by its first production, Rabindranath Tagore's late nineteenth-century play *Sacrifice*, one of the first productions of either classical or modern Indian drama in a city that proclaimed itself an international theatre capital. This production was followed by adaptations of classical or medieval Indian epics such as *Shikari* (1983, based on *The Mahabharata*) and *Anklets of Fire* (1985, adapted from a Tamil medieval epic), the sixteenth-century Bhavai farce *Tejo Vanio* (1986), along with the work of contemporary playwrights such as Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani. Other early work, such as *Inkalaab, 1919* (1980) and *Salt of the Earth* (1980), derived from historical research into events such as the Amritsar Massacre of 1919 and Gandhi's 1930 Salt March, respectively.

Through its productions and its theatre-in-education work, the company has actively sought to respond to the formative influences of migration for South Asian and for British communities. This work has not been limited to productions set outside of the UK. Early-devised works set in England, such as *Fuse* (1978), *Playing the Flame* (1979) and *Chilli in your Eyes* (1984), focused on the challenges that migrants of various generations faced in coming to England. Tara Arts's recently opened studio theatre has housed more broadly heterogeneous cultural productions, from jazz concerts to visiting productions by or collaborations with non-Asian diasporic companies and artists, along with work that more closely parallels their earlier output.³ Nevertheless, it is Tara's tradaptations that have garnered it the most critical attention and the largest audiences.

Its 1989 production of *Ala Afsur/The Government Inspector* is the earliest recorded British Asian theatrical adaptation. Jatinder Verma, Tara Arts's artistic director, refers to these productions as tradaptations, borrowing the term from Canadian director Robert Lepage, who borrowed it in turn from his compatriot and contemporary Michel Garneau. The term emphasizes the processes of translation and transformation involved in negotiating source and target cultural traditions as well as languages.⁴ Where Lepage and Garneau work with European and Canadian linguistic and cultural traditions, Verma's form of tradaptation expresses the heterogeneity of British Asian identity through the practice of "'Binglishing' the stage" that is described earlier in this article ("'Binglishing'" 126). According to Verma,

Binglish for me denotes more than modes of speech. If language is a way, following Marina Warner, of structuring the world, then Binglish more accurately reflects the fractured world—the overlapping world—that is modern England; where English vies with a whole host of languages in our cities and towns. ("Sorry" 198)

Verma emphasizes here how migration in its many forms has shaped the "fractured world ... that is modern England," as well as how "Binglish" both reflects and restructures it. Both the dramaturgical approach to this production and the timing of its selection demonstrate

the ways in which the company actively engages and redefines myriad cultural legacies of Europe and Asia. Its tradaptation of Gogol's 1836 play shifts it from a fictional Russian to a fictional Indian provincial setting ("Sir-Raja-Dowler," located "some distance to the east of East"; *AA/GI* 1) and to the period immediately following Independence (a fact known to the audience but not understood by the residents of the town). Such changes, among many others, hint at the connections between British and Russian imperial legacies that date back at least as far as the geopolitical rivalry of the 1800s known as the "Great Game." That it confronted these legacies in the moment of the formal dissolution of Soviet rule in Europe and Asia adds further resonances to its postcolonial dramaturgy. Furthermore, Verma's programme note, "The text, in transformation," traces the production's formal debts to Gogol's contemporary popular theatre, Italian *commedia dell'arte*, Indian folk theatre, and European naturalism, and then explains its textual development:

A straight-forward English translation of the Russian original—or even of the Indian adaptation—would not in-itself be sufficient when presented by Asian performers in 80s Britain. Thus began the journey into 'Indian-English,' into varieties of speech—prose, rhyme, verse, soliloquy, song; and into "quotation"—bringing to bear upon our adaptation of Gogol all we deemed relevant from other literary sources. Thus, Shakespeare, Kalidasa, Chekhov, Kipling, Salman Rushdie, Tennyson cohabit with Gogol in our version: an indication of the metropolitan breadth of the post-colonial's 'living heritage'. (Programme Note, *AA/GI*)

The note emphasizes the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of this postcolonial heritage, which can be seen, arguably, as a positive outgrowth of the dislocations wrought by colonialism. That such breadth is characterized as metropolitan points to the ways postcolonial migrants shape contemporary British society and culture, for what makes the metropolis broad is the influx of heterogeneous resources and people that produce its culture.

Timing again played a key role in Tara Arts's tradaptation of *Tartuffe*, created and directed for the Royal National Theatre in 1990, making Verma the first non-white director to work at the National. The commission was made just after the *fatwa* was proclaimed on Rushdie for *The Satanic Verses*, which made a religious satire an obvious choice for Verma ("Sorry" 193). Verma saw kindred comic traditions in Molière's form of comedy and Bhavai, a Gujarati-based form of theatre, and the production fused these traditions into a play-within-a-play performed by a pair of travelling artists from the Deccan province and framed by the visit of a Frenchman to the court of the seventeenth-century Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. The contemporary circulation of people and texts in the globalized world is linked in the frame play to a history of parallel forms of cultural transmission and translation in this period, particularly when the woman performer proposes to entertain the emperor with a translation of a play from the "farangis."⁵ The Emperor invites them to perform it, telling his French visitor that it would make "a fitting tale to recount to your king on your return—

how, in the courts of Aurangzeb, in far-off Hindustan, you were reminded of home!” (*Tartuffe* 2).

This endorsement of a French play performed by Deccan travellers (the Deccan is a region historically resistant to Mughal rule) characterizes Aurangzeb, an infamously tyrannical figure, as more tolerant of his “others” than one might anticipate.⁶ In the wake of Khomeini’s decree and its violent suppression of dissent, and of its global consequences for Rushdie and for Muslims worldwide, the play’s satire of false piety and patriarchal tyranny within a Hindu household (performed for the court of Aurangzeb and his French visitor) highlights the ways in which the entwining of the domestic, the local, and the global is neither a strictly Muslim nor uniquely contemporary phenomenon. On the other hand, one could read Aurangzeb’s acceptance of such a religious satire (with the titular character in the framed play translated from a Catholic to a Hindu religious charlatan) as deriving from a greater tolerance for the exposure of Hindu rather than Muslim hypocrisy.

These adaptations ask one recurring question: does the emphasis on the extension and transformation of European canonical works through the practice of dramatic adaptation reinforce Eurocentric visions of universality and aesthetic value? In an interview for the magazine *Artrage*, Verma argues, “All I have done is extend my repertoire, and it’s not important where the story comes from ... I will find a connection. Finding connections in adapting the play is the challenge to Eurocentrism. It is also true that, historically, Europe would not be Europe without the non-Europeans” (qtd. in *Artrage* 35).

Tara Arts’s version of *Tartuffe* highlights those global experiences produced through early European-Asian encounters, encounters that did not necessarily bear the weight of colonial cultural hierarchies. As with their *2001: A Ramayan Odyssey*, ten years later, the adaptation exposes historical entanglements and fusions that posit a cultural parity and mutual exchange that challenges such hierarchies of cultural and aesthetic value. Where *Tartuffe* stages a fusion of *commedia dell’arte* and Bhavai dramatic techniques, *2001: A Ramayan Odyssey* stages parallels and intersections between two epic traditions. Both the title and the interpellated epic plots evoke both non-geographic and specifically situated journeys that move in time from the classical to the space ages. The presence of the “other” hero onstage during the scenes focused on one epic narrative enacts a more egalitarian vision of the symbiotic relationships of centre to margin, in which Odysseus and Rama both alternate between being the hero and being the shadow figure. The play’s staging suggests a similar symbiosis between the global and the local, linking the spaces of sea, forest and performance site.

In comparison to Tara Arts’s practice of “Binglishing” by drawing on “the memory of ancestral lands in India and Pakistan” and on elements of contemporary England, Ayub Khan-Din’s plays seem to be most firmly located in England. In *Rafta, Rafta* Khan-Din does not engage with ancestral subcontinental memories but, specifically, contrasts 1960s North England with present-day North England, and

thereby emerges as a genuine northern English Asian chronicler of daily life.

When was the last time anyone boxed someone's ears on stage? When, for that matter, did anyone last write a comedy predicated upon two virgins happily marrying but failing to consummate their relationship because they're smothered by family? It was in 1963, since you ask, when Bill Naughton's bouncy, tender-hearted "All in Good Time" hit the stage. Happily, Ayub Khan-Din, author of the breakout Asian stage and screen hit "East Is East," has given Naughton's old-fashioned confection a splendidly enjoyable new lease on life. (Benedict)

Thus, the praise from *Variety* critic David Benedict after the premiere of Ayub Khan-Din's latest play, *Rafta, Rafta*, which opened at London's National Theatre in April 2007 and enjoyed a sell-out run. Benedict's favourable assessment of Khan-Din's adaptation of Bill Naughton's 1960s family comedy *All in Good Time* (1964) almost uncannily mirrors Linda Hutcheon's statement that an "adaptation is not vampiric ... nor ... paler than the adapted work" but that it "may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive" (176). In fact, Nicholas Hytner, the artistic director of the National who directed *Rafta, Rafta*, admitted, "It would never have occurred to me to look at Bill Naughton if Ayub hadn't come up with this. It's made me rather ashamed, and it forces me to think how many playwrights there are of the postwar period who are simply not in fashion—particularly in places like the National Theatre. It's encouraged us to dig around" (Grimley). In this respect, the work of a British Asian playwright seems to have led to the revival of an—arguably forgotten—and apparently quintessential English playwright. Given Tanika Gupta's earlier reworking of Harold Brighouse's *Hobson's Choice* at the Young Vic in 2003, we may even ask whether this can be seen as part of a larger trend of what may be termed "postcolonial adaptation" or, as Elleke Boehmer calls it, "cultural boomeranging or switchback, where the once-colonized take the artefacts of the former master and make them their own" (201).

On the one hand, this could be seen as an alternative to Bancel's critique of conventional adaptations. On the other hand, Boehmer's "cultural boomeranging" in regard to British Asian theatrical adaptation may also benefit from a clear differentiation between first and second generation British Asian theatre practitioners which also helps to explain Khan-Din's somewhat curious choice of source text. Although second generation British Asian playwrights still occasionally use classic postcolonial strategies such as the destabilisation of English through multilingual elements or code-switching (Gilbert and Tompkins 166), often there is no direct recourse to Asian theatre practices any longer. In fact, according to Verma, their "flirtation with Indian languages" often fulfils the same need as Bollywood films: "a means of entering, for a while, the Indian subcontinent without the interference of the migratory experience" (133). Not surprisingly, almost all plays are set in Britain in contrast to plays by Tara Arts and Tamasha and Kali productions, which are also often set on the Indian subcontinent or in Africa. In contrast to these pioneering British Asian theatre practitioners, second generation

British Asian dramatists have responded differently to diasporic experiences and their work can be read as an attempt to demystify conventional migrancy discourses. According to Revathi Krishnaswamy, the conflation of diaspora as a figurative concept—complete with a series of travelling metaphors and tropes—with a particular community is highly problematic and she asks:

[Has] the mythology of migrancy ... provided a productive site for postcolonial resistance or has it willy-nilly become complicit with hegemonic postmodern theorizations of power and identity? ... The metaphorization of postcolonial migrancy is becoming so overblown, overdetermined and amorphous as to repudiate any meaningful specificity of historical location or interpretation. (qtd. in Procter 14)

In a similar vein, we would argue that the “politics of location” in second generation British Asian drama is much less concerned with trying to create “a new home,” than with navigating the conditions in Britain as their native country and specific geographical locations as their rightful home which, admittedly, may often be complicated by their families’ multiple heritages and transnational ties. As Hanif Kureishi once explained, “Whatever I’ve written about, it’s all been about England in some way. ... the comic tradition ... and the interest in pop music Everything I write is soaked in Englishness, I suppose” (Kaleta 3).

Likewise, the generic and aesthetic choices of second generation British Asian playwrights are less determined by the increasingly inflationary concepts of “diaspora poetics” and “migratory aesthetics,” than by an intercultural and intertextual richness that is firmly rooted within a British context. British Asian plays and adaptations by second generation playwrights display a shift of thematic focus—away from the dramatisation of the anguish and the loss of displacement—as well as a shift in dramatic techniques, whereby the following concerns play a central role: intergenerational and gender relations, inter- and intra-communal conflicts, social stratification, class and gender inequality, urban and regional life, latent racism and a critique of essentialised notions of identity and binary concepts.

In terms of their dramatic techniques, forms and generic choices, the following are dominant in their dramaturgical toolbox: a preference for realism/social realism (for example, realistic narration, the use of “real” topographical signifiers such as street names, landmarks, etc.), “humorous appeasement” (that is, the deconstruction of Western stereotypes with non-confrontational humour), intercultural and intertextual references (especially globalised popular culture), the use of British sitcom formats and the satirization of Indian movie formats. Their overall preference for realist narration may also indicate that migrancy as such is not necessarily their main concern, since dramatisations of diaspora experiences often rely on non-realistic elements and forms to convey migrants’ anxieties.

Not only have most British Asian second generation writers never properly fitted the popular mould of “migrant” or “diasporic writer” in the first place, but they have, on the contrary, contributed to a strong regionalisation within Britain, as James Procter has observed: “The

regional and national landscapes of Britain have not simply been eroded or deterritorialised within black British cultural production On the contrary ... locale [is] an increasingly prominent and nuanced signifier” (13). This applies as much to Kureishi’s London plays as to what we may call Ayub Khan-Din’s “Greater Manchester plays.” It is within this regional framework that Khan-Din’s adaptation will be examined, since both Khan-Din and Naughton “belong to a tradition of playwriting firmly located in the social and cultural life of the Northwest of England” (Buonanno 2007), and most of their work is also set there.

Incidentally, Naughton, who was born in 1910 in County Mayo in Ireland, shares with Khan-Din a non-English heritage.⁷ Naughton’s work itself is marked by transgeneric adaptation, as his stage plays were often based on his radio plays and his biggest success, the film *Alfie* (1966), about a compulsive Cockney womanizer, is an adaptation of his own play and novel of the same name. Naughton has been called “the most popular English exponent of regional domestic comedy to appear in the 1960s” (Gassner/Quinn 599) and clearly benefited from the “rebirth” of British working-class theatre in the 1950s (Naughton, *Spring* ix). *All in Good Time* makes a comedy, rife with intergenerational conflicts, out of the joke that a couple of naïve young working-class newlyweds from Bolton cannot consummate their marriage because they live with their inlaws (“Blessed Are the Real”) and both stage sets are extremely claustrophobic.⁸

Khan-Din was born in Salford (Lancashire) in 1961 as the youngest of ten children, and he briefly worked as “the worst hairdresser in Manchester” (“East is East”) after leaving school and before starting to act and write. Not unlike Naughton’s success story with *Alfie*, Khan-Din became famous with his autobiographical screen hit and its even more successful film adaptation *East Is East*, which was workshopped with and first produced by Tamasha. In fact, the critic Philip Fisher remarked that *Rafta, Rafta* “could almost be dubbed *East Is East Part 2*” (Fisher).⁹ *Rafta, Rafta* translates from Hindi as “slowly, slowly” and it is the first line of a song by the famous Pakistani *ghazal* singer Mehdi Hasan, an important figure in Pakistan’s film industry (“Lollywood”). Also set in Bolton, “a world where *Coronation Street* meets *Goodness Gracious Me* and meat pies contend with the onion bhajis” (Marmion), Khan-Din transposed *All in Good Time* into a British Asian setting. Khan-Din’s “cultural relocation” (Sanders 2) and updating of *All in Good Time* is not least due to the National Theatre’s commitment “to showcase writing that reflects a multicultural Britain” (Buonanno n.p.) and to attract British Asian audiences (Fisher), mirroring Bancil’s critique of British Asian drama adaptations mentioned earlier.

In his adaptation Khan-Din closely follows the plot of *All in Good Time* and also draws on its film adaptation. The dialogue remains mainly unchanged and the changes that have been made are mostly cosmetic, as can be seen in the character lists, for example. Khan-Din also stays true to Naughton’s generic choice of the English kitchen-sink drama, although he replaces the northern working-class family

from the 1960s with a contemporary British Asian family. When Atul Dutt and Vina Patel, who just got married, move in with Atul's parents (played by Meera Syal and well-known Bollywood actor Harish Patel) and his younger brother Jai, interfamilial and intergenerational conflicts come to the fore. Due to the claustrophobic space, the marriage is never consummated. Although nobody knows about their painful secret for weeks, inevitably, not only their families but the whole community find out. The ensuing crisis not only reveals the damaging effects of communal surveillance and control (illustrated, for example, in the questioning of Atul's sexuality and male identity), but also unveils the unresolved issues and conflicts in their respective families and brings into focus the intergenerational conflicts between Atul and his father Eeshwar and between Vina and her mother Lata. Yet, like in *All in Good Time*, *deus ex machina*-like, the prospect of finally moving into their own place seems to provide a happy end for all concerned.

While the setting of *Rafta, Rafta* is still a working class home, Scene One firmly establishes the cultural relocation through a Hindu shrine above the fireplace and Eeshwar's greeting in Hindi. The play opens with the newlyweds returning home with their families and a few guests and the scene is dominated by the domineering Eeshwar, who stands in stark contrast to his more introverted son. Culinary metaphors set the tone and indicate the national identity of the characters in both plays: while Naughton's characters carry a keg of beer, *Rafta, Rafta* opens with large pans full of Indian food, thereby also already catering to the expectations of English audiences. Yet, as already demonstrated in Scene One, the perhaps anticipated set of problems between white British and British Asian characters gives way immediately to an exploration of intergenerational and intra-ethnic tensions. Thus, Vina gives Atul a BlackBerry as a wedding present, whereas Eeshwar talks about getting a water buffalo for his wedding from his father, dramatizing what Arundhati Roy has called "the ancient/modern conundrum" (188).

Also, while Eeshwar prefers traditional Punjabi *bhangra* music, Atul chooses to sing the "possibly more elitist" (Buonanno n.p.) devotional *Quawali* music. Here, Atul's more refined tastes may already be seen as symbolic for his desire for upward mobility. A similar conflict is also prevalent in *All in Good Time*, where Ezra is worried that his son should "overstrain his brain" with all "this unnatural reading and thinking" (Naughton 7). Interestingly, while father and son are divided in regard to their musical tastes, a second element of subcontinental popular culture is not only shared by Eeshwar and Atul but also by Asian and British audiences: (particularly classic) Bollywood movies. In regard to the ubiquity of popular culture influences and references, source text and adaptation are well suited and a comparison of Arthur's work as a cinema projectionist and Violet's work in a record store in England's "Swinging Sixties" with Atul's cinema work and love of Bollywood classics in the new millennium would deserve a closer analysis.

While Verma has been at pains in his theatre work to escape the “dead hand of realism” (“Impact”), as in *East Is East* Khan-Din seems to appreciate realism as a suitable form to express contemporary British Asian experiences and to value its lasting appeal to audiences. Moreover, *Rafta, Rafta*’s more conservative genre—albeit interrupted by glocal intertexts—not least fits its traditional subject which has been highly welcomed by critics who have remarked that in the current climate it has been a delight “to see an Asian play that has nothing whatever to do with Islamic extremism and suicide bombers” (Spencer “Laughter”).

Tanika Gupta, on the other hand, a well-known writer for the theatre, as well as for radio and TV, has also experimented with other dramatic forms such as docudrama (*Gladiator Games*) and the morality play (*Sanctuary*). Her work across media and genres has been instrumental in the crossover of British Asian culture into mainstream culture. She has often questioned the label of Asian writer, despite being often drawn to stories with an Asian or British Asian setting, reworked so as to have relevance beyond cultural borders and providing Gupta with material for her project of “staging the intercultural” (Gupta and Sierz 38), which we also see at work in Gupta’s rewriting of *Hobson’s Choice*. Along with original works, Gupta has written numerous adaptations and translations for the stage, including William Wycherley’s *The Country Wife* (2004) and a translation of Brecht’s *The Good Woman of Setzuan* for the National Theatre (2001). Her version of Dickens’ *Great Expectations*, relocated in nineteenth-century India premiered at the Watford Palace Theatre in February 2011. Gupta’s rewritings of works rooted in the English and European traditions may help to define her role as a writer beyond ethnic pigeonholing, as they erode binarism and polarized categories questioning what is original or derivative, central and marginal, native or foreign, while still reflecting the author’s Asian background.

Gupta’s *Hobson’s Choice* premiered at the London Young Vic in 2003 and also toured nationally. It can be seen as an Asian take on the play of the same title written in 1916 by Harold Brighouse, a playwright from Salford born into a family of cotton traders. *Hobson’s Choice* is defined as a Lancashire comedy (as it says on the cover of the playtext), set in Salford in the 1880s and dramatizes the reality of the industrialized North at a time of crucial social changes, raising the question of the exploitation of workers, the presence of sweatshops and the significance of business and trade to the economic growth of the area, while also acknowledging the emerging woman’s question in turn-of-the-century Britain. Brighouse is associated with an early twentieth-century so-called “Manchester school” of drama, predominantly realistic in inspiration and interested in exploring social issues through plays that were also meant to be entertaining, featuring amusing incidents and witty dialogue (McDonald).

As critics have noted, Gupta’s rewriting follows the original very closely: Charles Spencer found it “astonishing ... how little Gupta has to change. The paterfamilias who holds his daughters in servitude ... makes perfect sense in this Anglo-Asian setting” (“Glorious”), while

Michael Billington deemed Gupta's rendition to be "too faithful" to her source and would have expected "more narrative radicalism." Gupta argues in her preface to the text, that she has chosen to adapt *Hobson's Choice* as she was drawn to its extravagant dialogue and the comic elements that translate well "into the Bengali-Hindu background ... in a multicultural society" (8). She also worked on the possible resonance in the story with the dynamics of first and second generation immigrant life (that are also at work in *Rafta, Rafta*), but was particularly interested in establishing a connection between the oppressed working class of the 1880s with labourers in sweatshops that, as she argues, "are not only found in Indonesia and Malaysia but here in the UK too" (7).

In Gupta's version, Hari Hobson is a Bengali Hindu who, as a sign of his willingness to integrate, adopted the name of the tailor shop he bought in Salford in 1967, and is now a prosperous businessman. He is a widower and the authoritarian father of three daughters, who work in his shop as assistants for no wage. Hari has plans to marry off his two youngest daughters, but the project soon falters as he discovers that he will have to provide dowries, whereas Durga the eldest daughter at the age of thirty is deemed to be "a bit on the ripe side to marry" (Brighouse 2003, 29). But as a clever entrepreneur and saleswoman and the embodiment of female empowerment, Durga sets to challenge Hobson's authority by deciding to marry Ali Mossop the mixed-race Muslim employee who has worked for Hari for a long time for a ridiculous wage, despite being a very accomplished tailor. Ali may have been smuggled in the country illegally as we discover that Hari holds his passport. Durga and Ali set up their own tailor shop and their business flourishes while Hari's quickly declines. Hari himself falls prey to alcohol until Durga and Ali offer to rescue both him and his business on condition that Ali joins Hari as equal partner in his fashion business, now to be renamed "Rindi Sindi Fashion House." Following Brighouse very closely, Gupta's *Hobson's Choice* also revolves around the domineering father figure of Hari and explores tensions between father and children, while also placing a special emphasis on gender relations and the social value assigned to family relations and marriage.

Bollywood and popular culture are inserted in this production as cohesive elements of diasporic life. In *Hobson's Choice* music is often used, along with dance routines, adding a dimension of spectacle. As in the case of *Rafta, Rafta*, the first scene of *Hobson's Choice* is significant in showing some central elements of cultural relocation. The main change lies in the choice of transforming Hobson's shoe business into a tailor shop, occasioned, according to Gupta, by the fact that shoe making is no longer a common activity in Britain, whereas Asian communities still make use of tailors and Indian clothes shops are not an uncommon sight in British Asian cities: the relocation in a fashion house enhances the visual appeal in production as several dummies, beautifully dressed and adorned were displayed. The tension between tradition and modernity is also part of this opening scene and is often recalled throughout the play as the two youngest sisters

constantly shift from stylish Indian clothes to equally fashionable, albeit skimpy Western clothes, much to Hari's disappointment.

The opening scene makes reference to Hari being a member of the Salford Asian business association, but like Eeshwar, he is also proud of his Britishness: He claims he has always supported the conservative Party and he says of himself: "I'm Hobson. I'm British middle-class and proud of it. ... I'm not like all those phoney asylum seekers, scrounging off the state, always whingeing. I've worked hard in this country all my life" (Brighouse 2003, 21). Interethnic-intercultural cultural relations are further explored in the play: the youngest daughters are initially seen dating two white professionals, and later on with the help of Durga who tricks Hari into offering his financial aid, they will eventually marry them. Some critics have raised doubts as to whether this crossing of racial, class and religious boundaries is a credible situation that reflects life in contemporary Salford or if it should be rather read as the author's yielding to the temptation of celebrating multiculturalism, with the Hobsons living in "a racial utopia" (Eshun). One aspect of the play worth pointing out is the progress that Durga and Ali make in their determination to do well in setting up their own business. This is relevant to Asian life and especially in the northwest where the Lancashire region has traditionally been very active in the textile trade, and since the decline of textile mills many South Asians have turned into entrepreneurs and set up their own business. This process has also had an impact on the narratives of this area as suggested by Virinder Kalra in his study documenting the transition from "textile mills to taxi ranks," from paid factory labour to self-employment on a small scale and as the critic of the *Independent* has noted, the set of characters in Gupta's *Hobson's Choice* belong to a group "that has proved far more enterprising and successful than the white working class (Koenig).

What relationship of theatre to glocal imaginaries do such perspectives and productions suggest? We would argue that such theatre works both thematically and as a site of the collective, live embodied experience of the re-creation of memories and narratives of past and present, to connect its audiences to the global and local places that shape British identities more broadly, and British Asian identities more specifically. Further, the challenges for scholars writing about theatre and diaspora are intimately connected with the demands faced by theatre artists dedicated to responding to the conditions of migration and diaspora and their histories. If scholarship and theatre are alike in their aims of inspiring public dialogue, then the limited visibility and ephemerality of the latter can work against such aims. The very elements of theatre that might lend it vitality and dimension in performance—its embodied, site-specific, live-ness—pose tremendous challenges to its preservation and analysis. Likewise, the very conditions of migration and diaspora that demand urgent attention and rigorous analysis are similarly elusive. While we should be wary of simply mapping critical onto social marginalization, studying how theatre companies operate within and across multiple places can illuminate the conditions, the narratives, and other forces that "situate"

British Asians and shape their identities. Tara Arts is a company that self-consciously addresses these connections on multiple levels, from the postcolonial dramaturgy of their work to their more recent establishment of a studio space as a site of creative collaboration between local and international performing artists.

As hybrid texts and adaptations of existing plays embedded in the English tradition, *Rafta, Rafta* and *Hobson's Choice* have explored the potential of updating stories to fit the same setting, a 1960s working class Bolton community and the world of small business in 1880s Salford, respectively, and reflect on how they have changed in the twenty-first century. As Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier have already convincingly argued in their study on adaptations of Shakespeare, contrary to yielding to the possibly stifling effects of theatrical adaptation, playwrights can transform classic material and “reshape conventions in such a way as to expose the orthodoxies that support the tradition” (Fischlin and Fortier 17). The playwrights’ choice of tradaptation, of bringing across, has created hybrid aesthetics by rewriting the realistic domestic tradition of English drama and deliberately including elements of British Asian popular culture, exploiting its appeal on diverse audiences. *Rafta, Rafta* and *Hobson's Choice* engage with a past tradition of writing for the stage that is English, and that can be revived and offered a renewed life, so as to produce a cultural and theatrical space that is both English and South Asian and, in addition, locally situated. Proof of this is the Octagon Theatre in Bolton which celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Naughton’s birth in 2010 with a production of *Rafta, Rafta*. With reference to *Hobson's Choice*, Michael Billington has noted that Brighouse’s 1916 “regional milestone ... is a play of its time as well as a transposable myth.” In addition, Aleks Sierz has pointed out, that the best playwrights “not only write new work, they also rewrite drama history. ... Just as Brighouse rewrote Shakespeare by imagining a Salford Lear,” so Gupta rewrites it to celebrate both womanhood and multiculturalism, by imagining a glocal, diasporic space on the English stage through the lens of a classic English drama (873-4). In this way, British Asian playwrights such as Gupta and Khan-Din reclaim the Asian dimension of the northwest of England and register the transition from the Asian presence in the northwest, to the Asianness of Lancashire.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments. Special thanks are due to Sarah Dadswell and Graham Ley for bringing together the authors of this essay on the occasion of the conference ‘British Asian Theatre: From Past to Present’ at the University of Exeter, 10-13 April 2008, in the first place.

2. With specific reference to Khan-Din’s *Rafta, Rafta*, the appropriateness of rewriting an English modern classic as a British

Asian play was also questioned by Bancil and other participants in the concluding round table of the British Asian Theatre conference in Exeter. See:

<http://spa.exeter.ac.uk/drama/research/britishasian/conference_abstracts.shtml>. Selected papers from the conference are published in the forthcoming volume *Critical Essays on British South Asian Theatre*, edited by Graham Ley and Sarah Dadswell.

3. Some examples are *Suspended Lives*, a play about refugees living in the UK (in collaboration with IPSA, 2008/2009); *Born in Bethlehem*, a visiting production of the Palestinian theatre company Al-Harah (2008); a Bulgarian adaptation of the *Rape of Lucrece* (in Bulgarian/English, 2008); and a Moscow-on-Thames-set tradaptation of *Julius Caesar* (2008). Of the work more closely tied to Tara Arts's earlier focus on South Asian and Asian diasporic culture, recent examples are the historical drama *Gandhi in London* (2008) and the *People's Romeo* (2009-2010), a tradaptation done in the Bangladeshi theatrical/storytelling form Pala Gaan, in collaboration with director Mukul Ahmed and Pala Gaan expert Hossain Dilu.

4. As Mathieu Guidère explains, “Le terme « tradaptation » a été proposé par Jean Delisle (1986) pour rendre compte d’une évolution indéniable du métier. Il désigne des formes nouvelles du métier qui se distinguent par une imbrication de la traduction et de l’adaptation, devenues à notre époque les deux faces d’une même monnaie. Dans cette perspective, le traducteur se mue en tradaptateur, c’est-à-dire qu’il est chargé de l’adaptation des messages et autres produits de traduction” (20).

5. The term “farangi” in this context refers to the Franks/French, but in general is an Asian term for foreigners. See entries for “Frank” and “farang” in the *OED Online*.

6. For a more equivocal reading of Aurangzeb’s reputation, see the scholarly website MANAS, and in particular the following entry: <<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/History/Mughals/Aurang3.html>> (30 October 2010).

7. Since his father worked as a miner in Lancashire, Naughton moved to Bolton in 1914.

8. While the play may hardly be remembered, Naughton adapted the play for his film *The Family Way* (1966), which, starring John Mills and his daughter Haley Mills, and featuring a soundtrack by Paul McCartney, became a big success and remains a popular classic today. Khan-Din was actually inspired to do his adaptation of *All in Good Time* because he had seen a clip from *The Family Way* at a special BAFTA evening in honour of John Mills: “It was so funny that people were rolling in the aisles. I thought that it would work perfectly with

two Asian families because, especially with soaring house prices, people are still living with their parents after marriage” (Sierz 2007).

9. Its follow-up movie, entitled *West Is West*, which takes the Khan Family from Salford to Pakistan, was, in fact, released in Britain in February 2011.

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